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Soviets Closing Technology Gap, Pentagon Says

By TIM CARRINGTON

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON—The Pentagon's latest assessment of the Soviet military warns that the U.S. appears to be losing its technological advantage over Moscow.

Unveiling the fifth annual edition of the publication "Soviet Military Power," Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said that through "legal and illegal acquisition of Western technology," the Soviet Union has been able to erode the lead that the U.S. has held for years in that area.

Pentagon officials, in discussing the findings, characterized the arms race as a mutual pursuit of advanced technologies that make each new weapon progressively more lethal than its predecessor.

The Pentagon publication details recent Soviet advances in fighter jets, missiles and antimissile defenses. Mr. Weinberger projected that by the mid-1990s, the Soviet military will have many of the technologies pioneered by U.S. arms makers.

Backup for Budget Requests

The Reagan administration has used the publication to bolster its arguments for bigger defense budgets. Facing unprecedented pressure to help cut the budget deficit, Mr. Weinberger warned that unless the U.S. continues to increase defense spending, the Soviets soon will have an "exploitable advantage."

The administration's military buildup came to a halt in the current fiscal year when Congress chopped the Pentagon's spending authority by 6% after inflation. In addition, the administration's request for a \$33.2 billion increase in fiscal 1987 is being reduced significantly by Congress.

The Pentagon appraisal listed several Soviet weapons systems deployed in the past year. One, the SU-27/Flanker fighter jet, entered the Soviet arsenal this year, marking "the Soviet air force's transition to a new generation of far more capable combat aircraft," the Pentagon said. Mr. Weinberger said the Flanker closely resembles the primary fighter jet in the U.S. fleet, the F-15. "The technology was obtained from the U.S. through espionage," he said.

Other new systems include:

—The Delta IV, a new class of ballistic submarine that will be able to carry the SS-NX-23, a sea-launched nuclear missile now being flight-tested.

—A heavier and more accurate version of the SS-20, an intermediate-range missile, which is "nearing the flight-test stage," according to the Defense Department. The Pentagon book also contained recently acquired photographs of the current SS-20 and the mobile launchers that transport them.

—A new transport plane, dubbed the Condor by the U.S., that will be able to carry more weapons, including the SS-20 launchers.

Missile Silos Hardened

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union reportedly is making its nuclear arsenal less vulnerable to attack. Mr. Weinberger said that by the mid-1990s, all Soviet intercontinental missiles either will be in silos that have been hardened to withstand attacks or will be carried by mobile launchers that are difficult to target.

The Pentagon book said the Soviets have deployed more than 70 SS-25 mobile missiles, an action that the U.S. has said violates the 1979 SALT II arms treaty.

In addition, the Soviets reportedly continue to work on antimissile defenses, a program that parallels the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as Star Wars. The Pentagon said the Soviets' research program on laser weapons is much larger than that of the U.S., employing more than 10,000 scientists and engineers. Soviet ground-based lasers already could interfere with U.S. satellites, Mr. Weinberger said.